

CHAPTER 11. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The salvage archaeological excavations at Site 31SK15 revealed a portion of a circular structure and associated pit features that date to the middle of the sixteenth century. All pit features with diagnostic prehistoric artifacts appear to date to a single occupation during the protohistoric Early Sauratown phase. Radiocarbon dates also support this assumption.

The central site area as defined by the salvage efforts is approximately 16 m east-west, and 13 m north-south. There was no evidence of a palisade within the units excavated, and a round post structure was identified as a house. This measured approximately 9 m in diameter. A storage pit, Feature 16, was located inside of the house, while three other large pits (Features 1, 15, and 17) were all located within a 5-m radius of the house. Features 1 and 17 were located to the northeast, and Feature 15 was located to the west.

This site is unique among late aboriginal sites previously investigated in the upper Dan drainage in three regards. First, the site does not appear to have been damaged by the pothunting that has been so prevalent in the Upper Sauratown locality during the past three decades. The only potholes discovered at the site were those which had been dug into pit features exposed by the excavation of the lateral ditch. A great deal of information on sites associated with the Saura has been lost because of pothunting, and this site provides a rare opportunity to investigate an intact site.

Secondly, site 31SK15 appears to be a single component site. Simpkins (1985) noted that within the upper Dan drainage the settlement pattern from the late prehistoric period to the eighteenth century was characterized by relocation of villages in areas that had been previously occupied. This settlement history results in multicomponent sites that lack any vertical separation between components. The chronology of these multicomponent sites is difficult and time consuming to sort out. Site 31SK15 is located in the vicinity of a series of multicomponent sites occupied during the late prehistoric, protohistoric, and contact periods. Most of these sites have such dense posthole and feature distributions that determination of patterning is difficult. Site 31SK15 provides the opportunity to examine site structure within a single component site.

This site offers another unique opportunity for future archaeological investigation of the protohistoric period in the Dan drainage. The protohistoric period is not well understood in this area as only two probable protohistoric sites have been tested. Limited testing has been conducted at Early Upper Sauratown (31SK1), located south of NC 311 within the Sauratown National Register Historic District. At that site a test trench revealed a very complex multicomponent site with late prehistoric, protohistoric, and contact period components. This site has been severely damaged by pothunter activity, and the dense concentration of features and postholes further confuses the interpretation of the protohistoric component. Wilson (1983) identified portions of two circular structures with a palisade situated between them. The relationship of the structures to each other or either structure to the palisade could not be determined. Test excavations at the Powerplant site (31RK5), in the vicinity of Lower Sauratown in Rockingham County, revealed six features that may date to the Early Sauratown phase. No architectural remains were identified at this site. Site 31SK15 provides the best opportunity to study the protohistoric Early Sauratown phase in the region.

The relationship of the structure and associated pit features at 31SK15 to the protohistoric component at Early Upper Sauratown has not been determined. The ceramic assemblages from the two sites are very similar, suggesting that they could be contemporaneous. More than 300 m

separates 31SK15 and the northern limit of the mapped portion of Early Upper Sauratown (31SK1). As discussed above, it is impossible to determine whether the protohistoric component at Early Upper Sauratown represents a nucleated village. If the two sites are contemporaneous, it is unlikely that a single palisade would encompass both habitation areas. Based on the features within the area of the current excavation site 31SK15 appears to represent an isolated house located in the vicinity of a nucleated village at Early Upper Sauratown. This settlement pattern has not been identified at other sites in the region. It is also possible that the two sites were not occupied at the same time, but instead represent sequential protohistoric Saura village sites. Without more extensive excavations at both sites, the relationship between them is impossible to specify.

Excavations at 31SK15 salvaged the information contained in the portion of the site disturbed by the excavation of the lateral ditch. They also provided an unexpected glimpse into the organization of a little known site type. The salvage recovery has documented the research potential of the site. However, additional disturbances to the site are not anticipated by NCDOT, and it is not threatened by any planned activity.